

READERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS & ATTITUDES

Service to Blind & Physically
Handicapped Users
Executive Summary

Prepared by the Public Sector Research Group
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for

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The findings reported herein are based on a survey of users of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) conducted during September and October, 1979. The objectives of the survey were to develop a profile of the NLS readership and to aid NLS in future program planning by identifying readers' interests and concerns. The study was designed to determine the reading interests, library usage patterns, experiences with and attitudes toward reading materials and equipment, and general level of satisfaction of various subgroups of readers as well as of the general readership.

The program administered by the Library of Congress consists of a central federal unit and a network of regional and subregional libraries. The federal unit produces materials and equipment and provides administrative coordination. The regional and subregional libraries distribute materials to users in their geographic areas.

METHODOLOGY

Developmental Research

Before the questionnaire was designed, interviews were conducted with library staff and patrons. Lengthy discussions were held with library staff at two regional libraries. In-depth , one-to-one interviews were conducted with four library users, two of whom were bedridden or institutionalized. In addition, the regional librarian at each of these two libraries arranged a meeting of users (eight at one library and ten at the other) where the project director led an informal discussion of issues of concern to NLS users. Based on the issues which emerged through this qualitative research and with input from representatives of virtually all sections of NLS, a draft questionnaire was developed.

Pretesting

A sample of 140 names was compiled from the patron lists of four regional libraries. The printed questionnaire was mailed to 100 of these users; half of the mailings included a postcard which offered respondents the option of being interviewed by telephone. Attempts were made to interview the other 40 patrons by telephone.

Fifty-seven interviews were completed, 38 by mail and 19 by telephone. Pretest results indicated that:

- o The questionnaire content was basically sound but minor improvements were needed.
- o The regional library lists contained inaccuracies (wrong addresses or phone numbers, inclusion of deceased users).

- o Fifty-two of the 53 current library users who completed pretest interviews received either Talking Book Topics (TBT) or Braille Book Review (BBR), bi-monthly publications which describe reading materials available to NLS patrons.

User Survey Execution

Based on the pretest findings and discussions with regional librarians, it was decided to draw the survey sample from the TBT and BBR subscription lists. Questionnaires were mailed to 10,306 sample members in September, 1979. Three weeks later two-part postcards were mailed to nonrespondents to remind them to return their completed questionnaires. Respondents could use these postcards to request a replacement questionnaire (300 did) or a telephone interview (427 did).

A total of 4,415 interviews were completed for a response rate of 44 percent. Responses from the TBT sample and the BBR samples were analyzed separately.

Network Library Survey Execution

In December, 1979, a supplemental questionnaire was mailed to 150 regional and subregional libraries in the NLS network. The findings in this report are based on a total sample of 141 returned questionnaires.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Findings are reported under the headings of user characteristics, use of library service, equipment use, reading materials, users' assessments of library service, use of regional and subregional libraries, and Network Library Survey findings.

User Characteristics

User characteristics are displayed in Tables 1 and 2. Visual handicaps alone account for nearly two-thirds of the TBT sample's disabilities; about 7 percent of users have only a physical handicap, and about 28 percent have multiple handicaps. In general, the NLS readership consists of persons who are older than the U.S. population as a whole (50 percent of TBT users are over the age of 65). More females (57%) than males (43%) are NLS users, and about 93 percent of the readership is white. A majority of users (66% of the TBT sample) are retired or unemployed, and they tend to have limited annual incomes despite high levels of educational attainment. Most (approximately 70%) NLS users live with friends or family, although more than one-fifth live alone and slightly less than 10 percent live in institutions.

The braille readership, which comprises approximately 5 percent of NLS users, has somewhat different characteristics from the general readership. Braille readers tend to be younger (54% are under age 45) and to have completed more years of education. They are more likely to be employed or to be students and are less likely to have physical handicaps. Braille readers include more long-term NLS users than are found among the TBT readership.

TABLE 1
HANDICAPS REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS

<u>Type of handicap</u>	<u>User Survey</u>	<u>Non-User Survey</u>	
	<u>TBT Sample</u>	<u>NLS Users</u>	<u>Non-Users</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Visual only	64	52	31
Physical only	7	1	5
Learning only	1	1	7
Visual & physical	15	31	26
Visual & hearing	12	*	*
Other multiple	1	15	30

User Survey Source: Questionnaire Item 33.

Non-User Survey Source: Reading with Print Limitations Executive Summary, page 57.

*Not reported separately.

TABLE 2

SELECTED SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF NLS USERS,
NON-USERS, AND COMPARABLE FIGURES FOR U.S. POPULATION

	<u>User Survey</u>	<u>Non-User Survey</u>		<u>U.S.</u>
	<u>TBT Sample</u>	<u>NLS Users</u>	<u>Non-Users</u>	<u>Population</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Age</u>				
Under 14	5	8*	12*	22
15-44	21	23*	15*	48
45-64	24	26	26	20
65 and over	50	44	48	11

User Survey Source: Questionnaire Item 31.

<u>Sex</u>				
Male	43	45	40	49
Female	57	55	60	51

User Survey Source: Questionnaire Item 41.

<u>Race</u>				
White	93	91	79	86
Non-white	7	9	21	14

User Survey Source: Questionnaire Item 40.

<u>Employment Status</u>				
Employed	10	7	9	59
Student	9	18	14	5
Homemaker	15	10	13	19
Retired	49	36	41	6
Not working, other reason	17	28	23	11

User Survey Source: Questionnaire Item 35.

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	<u>User Survey</u>	<u>Non-User Survey</u>		<u>U.S.</u>
	<u>TBT Sample</u>	<u>NLS Users</u>	<u>Non-Users</u>	<u>Population</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Education</u>				
Grade School or less	21	23	47	19
High School	35	40	36	51
College	37	37	18	30
Trade/Technical School	7	**	**	**

User Survey Source: Questionnaire Item 34.

Income

Less than \$5,000	37	39	50	9
\$5,000-9,999	28	29	23	18
\$10,000-14,999	15	14	12	18
\$15,000 or more	20	18	6	55

User Survey Source: Questionnaire Item 36.

Living Arrangement

Live alone	22	21	23	8
Live with others	78	79	77	92

User Survey Source: Questionnaire Item 37.

Non-User Survey Source: Reading with Print Limitations Executive Summary,
page 49.

U.S. Population figures from the Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1979 edition, 1978 figures.

*Non-User Survey most comparable age categories are under 16 and 17-44.

**Not reported separately.

Use of Library Service

Only readers who had used NLS materials during the preceding year were considered eligible for the survey. The 498 respondents who returned the questionnaire but had not used the service were asked why; 384 readers gave one or more reasons. The most common reason, given by 22% was that the respondent had not had time to use the service. Eleven percent indicated they had not received materials requested, and about 5 percent expressed general dissatisfaction with the service. Among those who are currently using materials, 12 percent have used NLS for less than one year, while 21 percent have been users for at least 10 years. Thirty-seven percent of users first learned of the NLS from friends and relatives. In addition, many users first learned of NLS through a school, library, or other organization serving the blind or handicapped (35%). Few users first heard of NLS from radio, TV, or print media (less than 4%).

Users' contact with their regional and subregional libraries is generally limited to telephone and written communication. A majority (about 65%) receive a newsletter, and nearly all (95%) find it useful. Only 14 percent of users have ever visited their library in person. Two-thirds of those who have not done so said this was because the library was too far from their home. More users of subregional libraries (20%) reported visiting their library than did regional users (12%).

Equipment Use

While talking book record players are used by nine out of ten respondents, more than half of the readers use both a record player and a cassette player. Only one out of ten users report access to cassette players only. Older readers are less likely to use cassette players (48% of those aged 80 and older) and tend to report more problems with these machines when they do use them (38% of those aged 80 and older report difficulties in reading the cassette label; 16% have problems finding the right side of the cassette; and 14% have difficulties figuring out the controls).

In general, readers do not appear to have major problems in operating equipment. Reading labels on both records and cassettes is the most frequent problem; 21 percent of the TBT sample report a problem reading record labels and 18 percent report a problem reading cassette labels. In addition, readers report problems associated with the cassettes themselves, particularly receiving unwound tapes and difficulties in finding the right side of the cassette. Equipment features rated as very important by more than half of all readers are automatic stops and portability of machines. Portability is especially important to respondents between the ages of 10 and 64.

Reading Materials

Talking books on records are used very often by 67 percent of TBT respondents. Among readers under age 65, cassettes are used more often. About four out of ten TBT respondents report using magazines on records. This percentage is higher for older readers (about 45% among those 45 and older). Overall, about 4 percent report reading braille books or magazines. The most frequently used method of selecting reading material is by reading the one-line

description on the print checklist form; 43 percent of the TBT sample report that they use this method very often. Recorded Talking Book Topics is also used regularly (very often by 25%), as is the large print edition of this publication (very often by 32%). Braille readers are, of course, more likely to order from the Braille Book Review; 47 percent of the BBR sample use the braille edition of BBR very often.

Readers were asked three questions about their experiences in ordering reading materials - how often they like the library to select books for them, how often their orders are filled quickly, and how often materials they order are not available. Thirty-four percent never like the library to make book selections and another 14 percent seldom desire this service. Eighty-six percent report their book orders are often or sometimes filled quickly. Readers are less pleased with the availability of ordered materials than with the speed with which orders are filled; 49 percent report that ordered reading materials are often or sometimes not available.

Respondents' reading interests (Table 27) are diverse. Overall, bestsellers, historical fiction, humor, and biography were each rated as very important by at least 40 percent of readers.

While 27 percent of readers prefer male narrators, 71 percent indicate either no preference or that their preference depends on the subject of the book. Attitudes toward book content and narration vary with respondents' ages. Older readers tend to prefer male narrators and narrators without regional accents. In addition, they are more likely to object to fiction books which include strong language or explicit descriptions of sex. While 28 percent of the total TBT sample prefer that explicit descriptions of sex never appear in fiction, 47 percent of those aged 80 and older feel this way. No questions were asked about explicit descriptions of sex in nonfiction.

Only one out of every four users surveyed is aware of the NLS music service. The longer readers have used the NLS, the more likely they are to be aware of this service. About 10 percent of readers surveyed express an interest in receiving non-English materials, with Spanish being the most desired language.

Users' Assessments of Library Service

Readers express a high degree of satisfaction with the service provided by their regional or subregional libraries. About 60 percent rate the service excellent and another 32 percent rate the service good. Only 2 percent provide a poor rating. Users between the ages of 15 and 44 are less likely to give the service an excellent rating (48% do so) than are readers of other ages. Other reader characteristics associated with fewer excellent ratings are:

- o can read braille
- o institutionalized
- o male
- o employed

Most comments made by readers were positive although some suggestions were made regarding a desire for expanded book selection, equipment improvements, and improvements in the shipping of materials.

While few readers are dissatisfied overall, those who do give fair or poor ratings also express dissatisfaction with specific aspects of the services they receive from their library. Users who give fair or poor ratings also tend to:

- o Use talking books less frequently
- o Report more problems such as missing discs or cassettes or that ordered material is unavailable
- o Are less likely to report that orders are filled quickly
- o Do not like the library to select books for them.

Table 3 summarizes these differences.

Use of Regional and Subregional Libraries

Table 4 presents comparisons between users of regional and subregional libraries on equipment usage, service usage, and satisfaction. More users of subregional libraries (20%) report visiting their library in person than do users of regional libraries (12%). Sixty-eight percent of users of subregionals rate the service provided by their library as excellent as compared to 56 percent of users of regional libraries. More users of subregionals (70%) report that their orders for books are filled quickly than do users of regional libraries (60%).

Network Library Survey Findings

Librarians report several types of special activities which they undertake to serve such groups as the learning disabled and the temporarily physically handicapped. The major activities in these areas involve contact with groups and organizations serving these populations. In addition, libraries work with local media to publicize the service.

TABLE 3
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
RATINGS OF LIBRARY SERVICE
AND RESPONSES TO OTHER QUESTIONS

	Percent of users who report each experience among those who:		
	Give excellent rating	Give good rating	Give fair or poor rating
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Equipment and newsletter</u>			
Have access to TBT player	91	89	86
Use talking books on records very often	70	64	57
Use talking books on cassettes very often	54	52	51
Receive newsletter	66	59	46
Rate newsletter very useful	49	28	19
<u>Problems and experiences¹</u>			
Receive books with missing or damaged records	3	6	12
Hear other side of tape	4	6	10
Receive cassettes that don't play	4	6	14
Receive cassettes that must be rewound	11	16	25
Receive books with missing cassettes	3	6	9
Have problems finding correct side of cassette	9	13	14
Orders for books filled quickly	79	43	11
Ordered material not available	7	15	38
Like library workers to select books	26	20	15
<u>User characteristics</u>			
Able to read books and magazines in braille	8	10	20
Male	42	42	49
Female	58	58	51
Employed	9	9	16
Student	8	10	14

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Percent of users who report each experience among those who:		
	Give excellent rating	Give good rating	Give fair or poor rating
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>User characteristics</u>			
Homemaker	16	14	13
Retired	51	49	37
Unemployed	16	18	20
All respondents	58	32	9

¹For Problems and Experiences, represents percent of respondents who answered question "very often."

Source: Questionnaire Items 26, 9, 11, 18a, 27, 28, 35, and 41.

TABLE 4
USE OF REGIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL LIBRARIES

	<u>Regional users</u> <u>%</u>	<u>Subregional users</u> <u>%</u>
<u>Equipment</u>		
Have access to talking book record player	91	91
Have access to talking book cassette player	69	66
<u>Library and newsletter usage</u>		
Have visited in person	12	20
Report no problem in visiting	6	13
Report that library is too far	72	53
Receive a newsletter	61	68
Rate newsletter very useful	38	42
Source: Questionnaire Items 27, 28, 29a and b.		
<u>Overall satisfaction and problems¹</u>		
Rate service excellent ¹	56	68
Rate service poor	2	2
Orders for books filled quickly	60	70
Ordered material not available	13	10
Report problems with missing records	5	3
Receive cassettes that don't play	6	3
Receive cassettes that must be rewound	14	13
Receive books with missing cassettes	5	3

¹For entries 3-9, represents percent of respondents who answered question with very often.

Source: Questionnaire Items 9, 11, 18a, and 26.

Librarians indicate that few readers visit the libraries in person. Nearly two-thirds of the librarians report that no more than ten patrons visit the library in an average week. Like the readers themselves, librarians feel that distance and transportation problems account for this low level of personal contact. Again, librarians agree with readers that friends and relatives are the primary source of initial information about NLS.

Activities carried out most often to introduce new patrons to the NLS are welcoming letters and information/catalogs sent by mail. Some librarians report that new patrons are contacted by telephone or in person. About half of the librarians surveyed said that new patrons are sometimes or often given personal instructions in machine operation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data in this report suggest recommendations for actions which can be expected to improve the reading experiences of the population with print limitations. Suggestions are divided into those for the NLS central unit, responsible for producing materials and coordinating activities, and those for the network libraries, responsible for identification of users and distribution of materials.

Recommendations for NLS

- o Develop a campaign to attract non-white, less educated, and low-income readers to the NLS.

Comparison of the characteristics of respondents in this survey with the findings of the non-user survey indicates that the library has been less effective in reaching non-whites, readers with less education, and readers from low-income households. In part, this can be explained by a lower degree of awareness of the NLS among these groups. While 38 percent of whites first learned of the library through friends or relatives, only 17 percent of non-white users learned of the NLS in this manner. Thus, other means must be found for reaching this population.

Analysis of the attitudes and experiences of current users with these characteristics suggests that the following activities would be needed in any effective campaign:

- o Determine reading interests of these readers
- o Produce more books on the topics of interest to these readers

- o Publicize the wide range of topics available
- o Inform potential readers that knowledge of braille is not needed
- o Encourage additional distribution of information through organizations which serve the blind and physically handicapped

Blacks and readers with relatively less education are more likely than other readers to report a desire for a greater variety of topics. Seventeen percent of black respondents and 20 percent of Hispanics who have not used books from the NLS in the past year give lack of interest in the available topics as their reason. To attract and keep these readers, NLS needs to determine the topics desired, have them produced, and then publicize their availability.

Another 17 percent of black respondents and 20 percent of Hispanics who have not used books from the NLS in the past year give inability to read braille as their reason. Consistent with this finding, more black than white current readers are able to read braille. Apparently, there is some confusion among potential black NLS users about the kinds of reading materials available. Information aimed at these users which describes the program should make it clear that the ability to read braille is not necessary.

Most current non-white readers first learned of the library through organizations which serve the blind or physically handicapped. It appears that these organizations are effective in reaching non-white readers. Thus, their efforts should be encouraged and supported by NLS.

- o Review and improve the process by which new readers are introduced to NLS

Several survey findings suggest that the process by which new readers are introduced to NLS can stand improvements. First, only one in four readers is aware that music can be ordered from NLS. Awareness of the music service is directly related to the number of years a reader has been using the library. Certain problems--i.e. reading record labels, finding the beginning of a record, and finding the correct side of the cassette--also occur more frequently for new users than for readers who have used the library for many years. In addition, reader comments suggest that there are users who are not aware of whom to contact when equipment repairs are needed or difficulties occur. Finally, librarians indicate that readers use a variety of methods to identify defective materials.

While the occurrence of problems is rare, improvements in the information given to new readers might lead to even further reductions. Although network libraries have responsibility for introducing new patrons to NLS, it would be more efficient if the federal unit were to review the methods and introductory materials currently used by the network libraries, revise these as needed, and make the new materials available to all network libraries.

The following topics should be included in such an introductory packet:

- o Obtaining equipment
- o Operating equipment
 - Avoiding problems with talking book record players
 - Avoiding problems with cassette players

- o What to do when equipment breaks
- o Ordering materials
 - Topics available
 - Talking Book Topics
 - Braille Book Review
- o How to identify defective materials
- o Special materials available
 - Music service
 - Books in foreign languages
 - Newsletters
- o Communicating with your library
 - How to request new materials
- o Establish and publicize throughout the network explicit service objectives

In this report, we present data on the frequency and kinds of problems experienced by users and readers' attitudes toward the availability of materials, the speed with which orders are filled, and so forth. Although the absolute frequency of reported problems is low, only NLS policy-makers can decide what level is acceptable.

Given the financial and staffing constraints which network libraries face, some problems are inevitable. Precise objectives regarding service acceptable levels of problems are needed.

The American Library Association (ALA) has recently developed and published new standards for the established network of libraries for the blind and physically handicapped. These standards provide a context for interpreting the findings of this survey and for designing future user sur-

veys. We would encourage NLS to continue to refine these standards. Wherever possible, precise measurable objectives should be specified. The new standards are very precise regarding expectations for circulation of materials: for example, all returned materials shall be inspected and available for use within one work day and responses to user requests, whether positive or negative, shall be made within two work days. Additional precision regarding quality control objectives would be useful.

- o Develop disc and cassette labels which are easier to read

More than one out of every three readers aged 80 and older are often unable to read the labels on discs and cassettes. Efforts should therefore be directed to improve the labeling process through changes in type, size and/or label position. Discussions with readers who are frequently frustrated by the current labels can identify the features which need to be changed.

It would be wise to test the revised labels before they are widely introduced. If funds permit, labels in the new and current formats should be presented to a sample of readers who experience problems reading the current labels to assess whether the proposed changes result in less difficulty for these users.

Only 2 percent of the librarians surveyed mentioned poorly positioned or hard to read labels as a serious problem. Apparently, patrons who experience this frustration do not inform their libraries.

- o Support mechanical improvements in cassette players

Improvements in the controls of cassette players would directly help physically handicapped readers. In spite of the fact that they use cassette players more frequently than

do other users, physically handicapped respondents report that they often find it too strenuous to operate cassette controls.

Older readers, regardless of handicap, also experience difficulties operating cassette players. We note that NLS is currently supporting the development of a much simplified cassette player. NLS has also designed extension levers which can be attached to a cassette player to enable physically handicapped readers to operate these machines more easily. These improvements can be expected to increase the reading pleasure of readers who are elderly and/or physically handicapped.

- o Consider the subject matter and likely audience for a book which is being recorded when its narrator is selected

While 27 percent of respondents always prefer a male narrator, 67 percent report that their preference for a male or female narrator depends on the subject of the book. In general, NLS should use a narrator whose sex is appropriate to the subject matter of the book being recorded.

Older readers and readers with hearing impairments regardless of age are more likely than other respondents to prefer male narrators. These respondents also express a desire for a straightforward narration; that is, they dislike the use of different voices or accents for different characters. Possibly a male narrator who delivers a straightforward reading is more easily understood by these subgroups.

NLS should assess the likely audience for each new book to be recorded. Books, such as biographies, which are likely to be popular among those aged 80 and older, should be narrated by a male who does not use different voices or accents.

- o Inform readers when there is strong language or explicit description of sex in books

The issue of strong language and explicit descriptions of sex in fiction is a difficult area. In response to an openended question on problems in book selection, sex or strong language is the most frequent problem reported by librarians. In the user survey, approximately 30 percent of respondents, and higher percentages of older readers, feel that such material should never be included in fiction. Other readers, however, wish to exercise their own judgment regarding the content of books they read.

Clearly, censorship is inappropriate for a public library program. An acceptable alternative is to include a brief description of content at the beginning of each recorded book, and, in fact, a large majority of NLS users report they would like such annotations. Respondent comments stress that annotations can be useful, particularly in weeding out objectionable books. NLS currently records a book jacket blurb at the beginning of each recorded book. This could be expanded to include information about the language and sexual content of the book.

Whatever approach is used, providing information on the sexual content of books must be done with care to avoid offending any readers. Conservative readers are opposed to such material. In contrast, more liberal readers are angered by any appearance of censorship or condescension.

We should note that the opinions of persons with reading limitations reported in the non-user survey are more conservative than those of current NLS readers. Approximately two-thirds of non-users feel that books containing strong language and explicit descriptions of sex should not be available in public libraries. Older people, persons from low-income households, and less educated people are more likely than others to object to such material. Efforts to increase readership among these groups must consider these attitudes.

o Encourage the development of subregional libraries

More users of subregional libraries than users of regional libraries rate the service they receive as excellent. Subregional libraries are able to fill orders more quickly. Users of subregionals are more likely to receive a newsletter and to visit their library in person than are users of regionals. While most users of regional libraries are satisfied, establishment of additional subregional libraries can be expected to produce small improvements in the services mentioned.

o Encourage network libraries to develop innovative ways to serve patrons

Among our recommendations for network libraries are the development and testing of programs which might allow the network libraries to serve patrons even more effectively than at present. While network libraries are responsible for direct services to patrons, support from NLS is probably needed for the network libraries to develop new programs. We would encourage NLS to consider establishment of a program to provide funds for service improvement at the regional/subregional level.

Recommendations for Network Libraries

- o Provide a formal method for obtaining input from readers on a regular basis

To provide the variety of materials desired by such a large and diverse group as NLS readers is a difficult task. Librarians and users differ in their opinions of topics needed. Librarians see a great need for books on religion, westerns, humor, light fiction, and classics. Except for humor, these are not the topics desired by most users. Respondents in the user survey rate bestsellers, humor, biography and historical fiction as most important.

A regular, formal method of allowing readers to inform the library/NLS of their interests is needed. One solution would be to modify the forms currently used by readers to order available materials from their network libraries. Space should be provided for readers to list desired books which are currently not available in talking book (or braille) format. After network libraries compile these data, they could forward the information to the NLS production division.

- o Select books only for readers who request this service

While 23 percent of respondents appreciate having books selected for them by their network library, more than one-third of respondents never want this to be done. In their responses to the Network Library Survey, librarians overestimate the extent to which patrons desire their library to make book selections. Apparently, some regional and subregional libraries need to review the system by which they decide to select books for certain patrons. All readers should know that their library is willing to select books for them, but only readers who request this service should receive it.

- o Develop and evaluate a pilot program to contact infrequent users of talking books

While most current readers express a high level of satisfaction with their network library, respondents who give their library a fair or poor rating also experience more problems with the equipment and voice more complaints about the availability of materials and the speed with which orders are filled. Compared with respondents who give their library a good or excellent rating, these less satisfied readers also report less frequent use of talking books.

Perhaps certain readers who, for whatever reasons, are frustrated by negative experience with NLS, gradually decrease the frequency with which they use talking books until, finally, they cease using NLS materials completely. This hypothesis is consistent with the high proportion of good and excellent ratings given by current readers; frustrated patrons, of course, seek alternate ways to read. We recommend that one or several network libraries conduct a study to test:

- o Whether less frequent readers have more complaints than do more frequent readers and
- o Whether intervention on the part of the library could resolve the problems before the frustrated reader goes elsewhere.

Specifically, the pilot study would have the following framework:

- o Keep records on the frequency with which library patrons use talking books
- o Identify those readers who use talking books less often than a set criterion (low-use readers)
- o Contact half of the low-use readers to assess the reasons for low-use and to solve any problems experienced

- o Continue to monitor the use of talking books by those identified as low-use readers
- o Determine whether the low-use readers who were contacted show an increase in their use of books as compared to the low-use readers who were not contacted; also assess the extent to which each group of low-use readers has ceased using the program.

If intervention is effective, similar programs could be initiated in other network libraries where funds and staff were available. To aid in the decision whether to implement the program on a wide scale, costs involved in the pilot program should be carefully monitored.

- o Evaluate the use of different methods of introducing new patrons to NLS

Most librarians report that they introduce new patrons to NLS by sending information, sometimes with a welcoming letter, through the mail. Welcoming phone calls are also used, but to a lesser degree. Personal instruction is least frequent: 28 percent of librarians sometimes or always make a personal visit and 50 percent sometimes or always provide instructions on machine use in person.

Network libraries should evaluate the benefits of providing personal instructions to patrons. There is evidence that new users experience more problems than do seasoned users in using equipment. There are also some communication problems: new users often are unaware of the music service and sometimes indicate that they do not know how to obtain or replace equipment.

We cannot determine from the user survey the extent to which such frustrations have led new readers to discontinue using NLS. A controlled study in several libraries of the extent to which different methods of instructing new patrons result in decreasing problems for new users and, thus, in

their continued use of NLS would be useful. Such a study might compare the following methods of introducing new patrons to NLS:

- o Only mail instructions
 - o Mail instructions followed by a telephone call in several weeks to question patrons about problems they have experienced and to provide solutions to these problems
 - o Instructions in person
 - o Instructions in person followed by a telephone call in several weeks to question patrons about problems and to provide solutions.
-
- o Improve inspection procedures

The new ALA standards state that libraries shall inspect all materials received and make them available for recirculation within one work day. Twenty-four percent of responding libraries report that they do not usually inspect reading materials for defects. These libraries should institute regular inspection procedures.

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R227 READERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS
E31 & ATTITUDES: SERVICE TO
BLIND AND PHYSICALLY HANDI-
CAPPED USERS, EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY.

Date Due (1981)

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READERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS &
ATTITUDES: SERVICE TO BLIND AND
PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED USERS,
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